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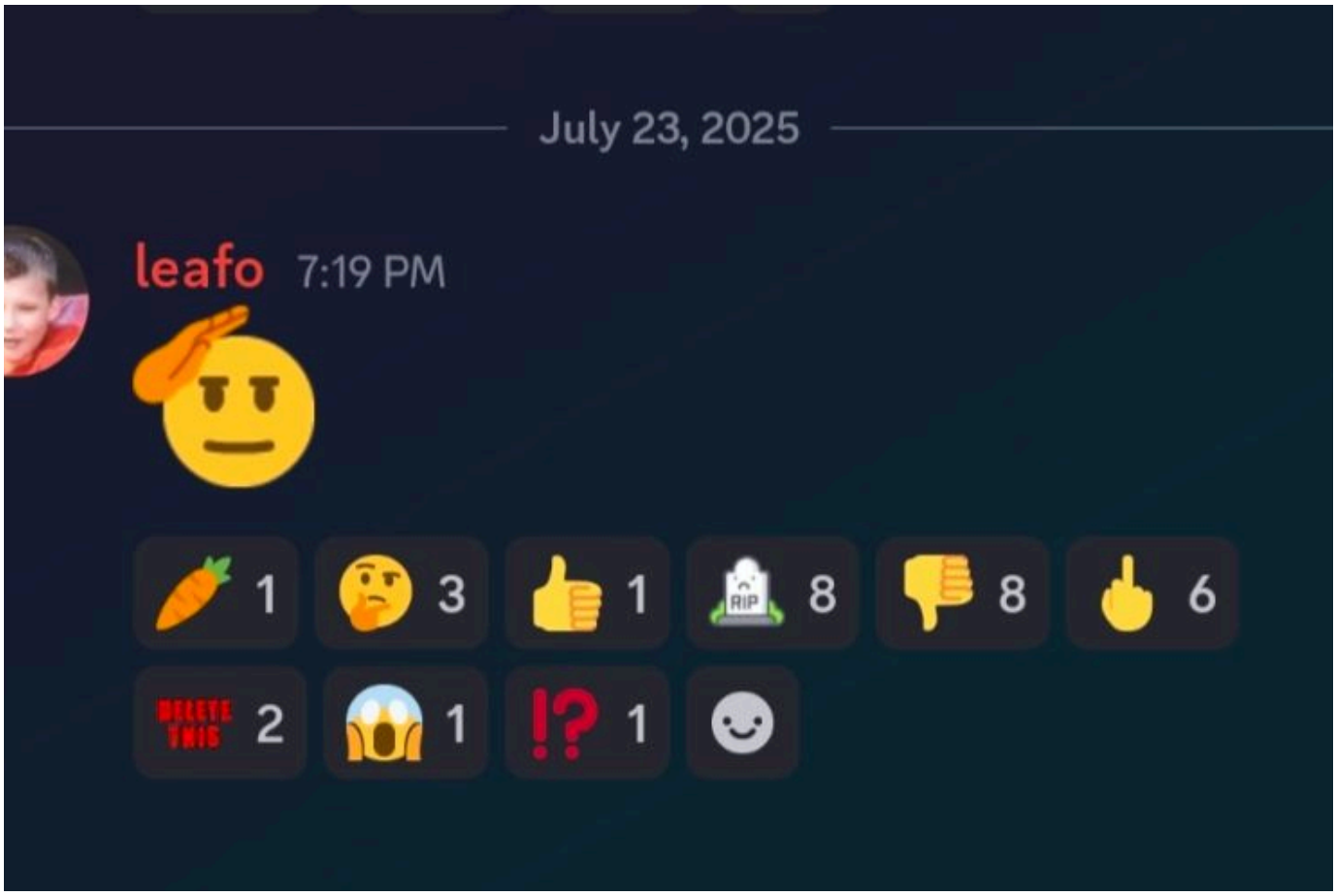
POLITICS AND CURRENT EVENTS, TRANS LITERATURE PRESERVATION PROJECT

Major Indie Marketplace Itch.io Shadowbans NSFW Content, Trans Authors Impacted

Published by **Bethany Karsten** on July 24, 2025



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Payment Processors Crack Down on Independent Art

On the evening of July 23th, major indie distribution platform itch.io initiated a major crackdown on NSFW content. Primarily targeting NSFW games, the platform no longer shows a majority of NSFW content in search results, discovery pages, and even on the individual store pages of the authors.

Content creators on itch.io were not informed about this change before initiated, and the dramatic shift in policy has taken many game dev and authors by surprise. As of the publication of this article, itch.io's guidelines on NSFW content have *not* been updated to reflect this change, nor has the website given any transparency or information about what it entails and what types of content will be impacted.

Nothing in itch.io's current policy suggests any justification whatsoever for such a dramatic purge of NSFW content:

> *We don't allow hosting content that includes sexualized images or videos of real-life humans. Fictional, illustrated, and rendered content is generally fine, assuming it's legal. AI-generated imagery that is designed to resemble photographic content of real people is not allowed. Content glorifying sexual violence is not permitted. Depictions of minors, minor-presenting, or suggested minors in a sexual context are not allowed and will result in account suspension.*

Itch.io's sudden turn toward censorship is alarming, and appears to be a direct consequence of Steam's cowardly decision last week to remove several NSFW games from their platform. That in turn resulted from an ongoing pressure campaign by payment processing companies Mastercard and Visa, who have historically used their monopoly over global transactions to force sex workers and other NSFW content creators out of business.

The latest wave of anti-porn organizing is spearheaded by Australian group Collective Shout, who have a long and miserable history of campaigning against porn in the gaming industry. It's crucial to recognize that Collective Shout's anti-porn crusade is much, *much* more draconian than you probably realize. In a report submitted to the United Nations this January, the group wrote:

> *We support the concept of a continuum of violence as developed by Professor of sexualised violence Liz Kelly, which proposes that all forms of male violence against women [MVAW] are connected. Sexual violence is not limited to rape, but all forms of violence, abuse, control by men over women. "Sexual violence includes any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the*

> *time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact."*
>
> *[...] Pornography does not only depict violence against women, it is violence against women and*
> *girls. As Tankard Reist and Bray state in Big Porn Inc (2011), "Real people suffer real harm*
> *through pornography."8 It is real women who experience acts of degradation and violence. As*
> *feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon noted, pornography is a record of men's violence*
> *against women. Acted out on the bodies of real women who are directly used to produce it –*
> *"what pornography does, it does in the real world."9 A pornographic scene featuring a woman*
> *being strangled, for example, cannot be produced without an actual woman being strangled*
>
> *[...] Pornography is violence against women, and those who consume it are more likely to commit*
> *violence against women, or have an attitude supportive of violence against women.*

At this point, it remains unclear about the precise reasons behind this unannounced and unexplained shadowban. However, Steam *did* update their terms before removing NSFW games, which can help us shine light on the issue:

> *15. Content that may violate the rules and standards set forth by Steam's payment processors and related card networks and banks, or internet network providers. In particular, certain kinds of adult only content.*

This change has some precedence in the itch.io Terms of Service:

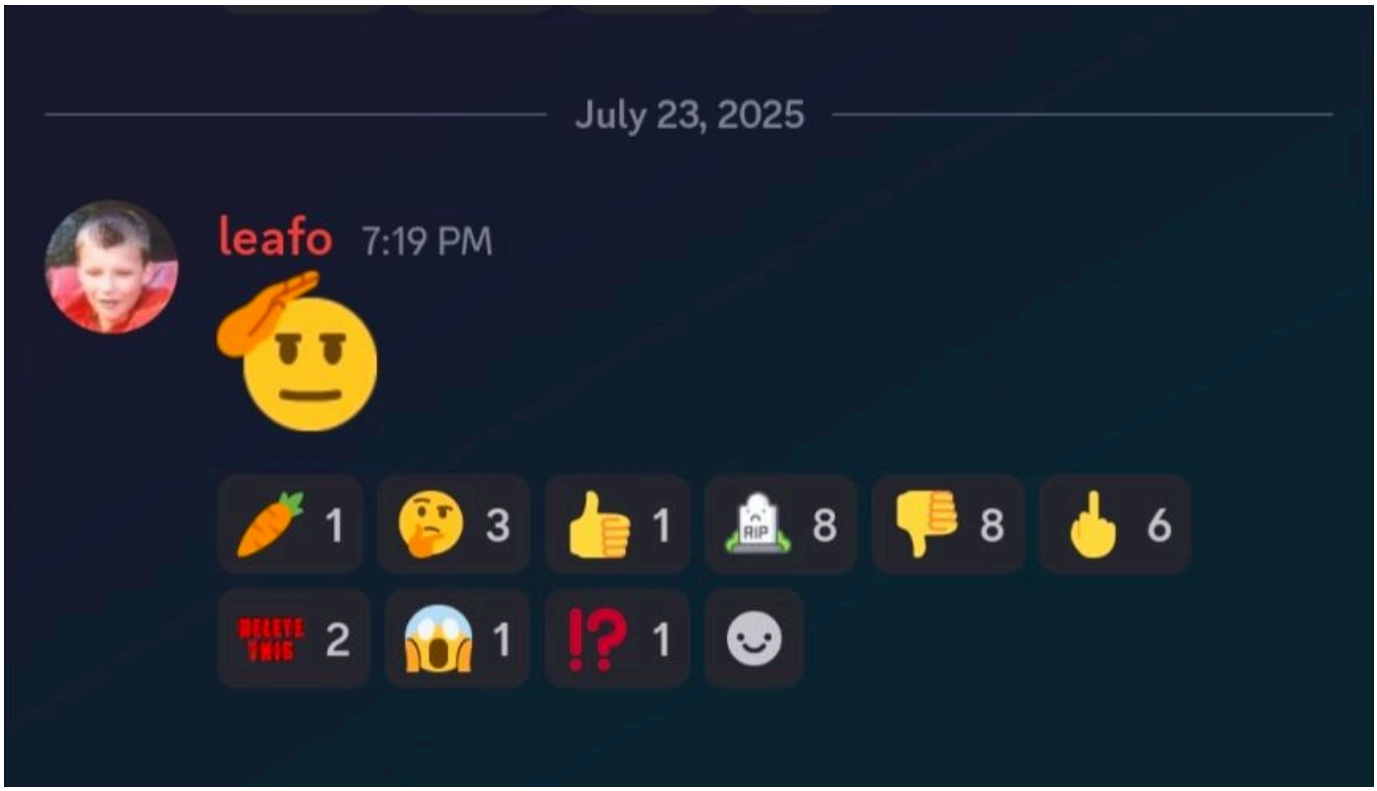
> *If you plan to collect money for your content, then you must adhere to the acceptable use policy of all respective payment processors that your account utilizes.*

What this indicates is that the crackdown on NSFW games at Steam reflects a broader shift in the payment processing industry, one which has *not* been made transparent to the public at-large. Mastercard and Visa are ultimately the primary culprits in this latest wave of censorship. While enormously disappointing, Itch's new NSFW shadowban was not unanticipated either – earlier this week, it was reported last week that itch.io was one company among many under Collective Shout's cross-hairs.

In 2021, journalist Ana Valens warned about the dangers of payment processor censorship on itch.io, and her prescient warning seems to have come due. She wrote:

> *Praise itch.io as we may, the platform is only as friendly to queer smut peddlers as its payment processors allow us to keep using it. Because itch.io is a company seeking longevity, don't expect itch.io to go down with the pornographers it seemingly holds dear, no matter how many funny Tweets its Twitter account makes.*

In another concerning turn, the owner of itch.io gave a cryptic reaction to community outrage on Discord, and has offered no clarity or explanation since:



The most concerning detail of all, however, is that itch.io's Terms *also* include a clause that suggests content removed for violating the site's policies can have payouts withheld from their creators. This could be *incredibly* devastating for indie trans authors, many of whom have no other source of income and rely upon itch as their primary stream of revenue.

> *If you've collected money while in violation of terms, we may be forced to refund or freeze all pending transactions, as accounts that are in violation of our terms are not eligible for payouts.*

UPDATE: I am getting *confirmed* reports from creators whose work has been removed (not just delisted) that Itch.io may be withholding any outstanding payments. This is a major financial blow to independent creators and an incredibly scummy move with no prior warning.

This is a developing story, but I have done my best to take stock of the immediate aftermath, and to try and compile as much information as I can to help trans authors navigate this uncertain moment.

MAJOR UPDATE: Itch.io Goes Full Morality Police

Here is Itch's initial response to the situation. I will let it speak for itself.

> *We have "deindexed" all adult NSFW content from our browse and search pages. We understand this action is sudden and disruptive, and we are truly sorry for the frustration and confusion caused by this change.*
>
> *Recently, we came under scrutiny from our payment processors regarding the nature of some content hosted on itch.io. Due to a game titled No Mercy, which was temporarily available on itch.io before being banned back in April, the organization Collective Shout launched a campaign against Steam and itch.io, directing concerns to our payment processors about the nature of certain content found on both platforms.*
>
> *Our ability to process payments is critical for every creator on our platform. To ensure that we can continue to operate and provide a marketplace for all developers,*

> *we must prioritize our relationship with our payment partners and take immediate steps towards compliance.*
>
> *This is a time critical moment for itch.io. The situation developed rapidly, and we had to act urgently to protect the platform's core payment infrastructure. Unfortunately, this meant it was not realistic to provide creators with advance notice before making this change. We know this is not ideal, and we apologize for the abruptness of this change.*
>
> *We are currently conducting a comprehensive audit of content to ensure we can meet the requirements of our payment processors. Pages will remain deindexed as we complete our review. Once this review is complete, we will introduce new compliance measures. For NSFW pages, this will include a new step where creators must confirm that their content is allowable under the policies of the respective payment processors linked to their account.*
>
> *Part of this review will see some pages being permanently removed from itch.io. Affected accounts will be notified via their account's email address from our support address. You can reply to that email if you have any follow up questions.*
>
> *We ask for your patience and understanding as we navigate this challenging period. I'm sorry we can not share more at this time as we are still getting a full understanding of the situation ourselves. We will post a follow up on our blog if the situation changes.*
>
> *Thank you.*

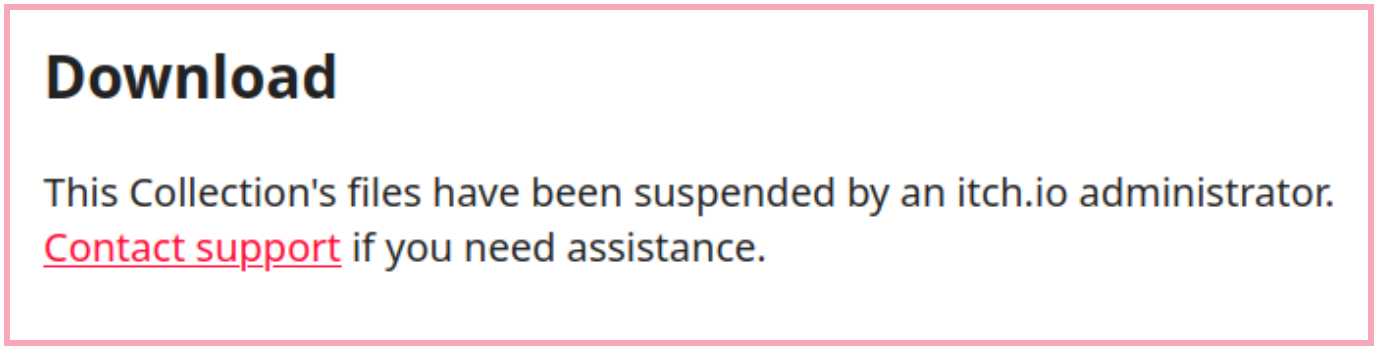
What Got Banned

At first reporting, it appears that itch.io's new shadowban is sloppy, haphazard, and entirely incoherent on a case-by-case level. The ban appears to have primarily targeted certain tags on the platform, including "erotica," "hentai," "adult," and other labels frequently associated with pornography. While the vast majority of banned content is still accessible via direct link, it

appears that impacted works have been delisted from all search results, even for signed-in users who have turned off the NSFW filter.

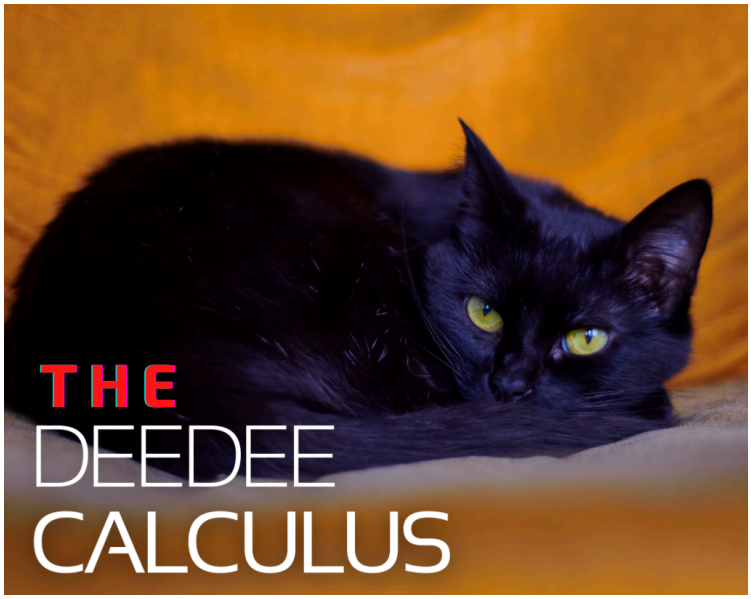
We have no current clarity or information about the specifics of this. I am also hearing varying reports about how severe these bans seem to be – some on Bluesky are reporting games being deleted from the platform altogether, while others are reporting that removing NSFW tags from their work has been enough to get their fiction relisted.

Multiple novels by transfeminine authors have been outright removed from the platform, and display the following message when viewed on the store page.


Download
This Collection's files have been suspended by an itch.io administrator.
Contact support if you need assistance.

Titles removed:

- *The Dee Dee Calculus* by Bailey Saxon
- *In Her Garden* by Abigail Gloom
- *snowcorpse necromancy, malcatras' maiden, DIVINE DESPAIR DEVIANCE,* and *hopeless junction* by Nadia Nova
- *Sisterfuck* by Natalie Tautou
- *Dad Stuff 1* by Alexi



This is an incomplete list; I will do my best to keep updating it as more titles come to light. I reached out to Bailey Saxon, author of *The Dee Dee Calculus,* who shared on the ban:

> *It's my first publication and I'm fucking pissed that they're not only preventing people from downloading something they paid for, but they had the nerve to just axe my content without even saying anything. Not impressed with how itch handled things all sneaky and shit.*

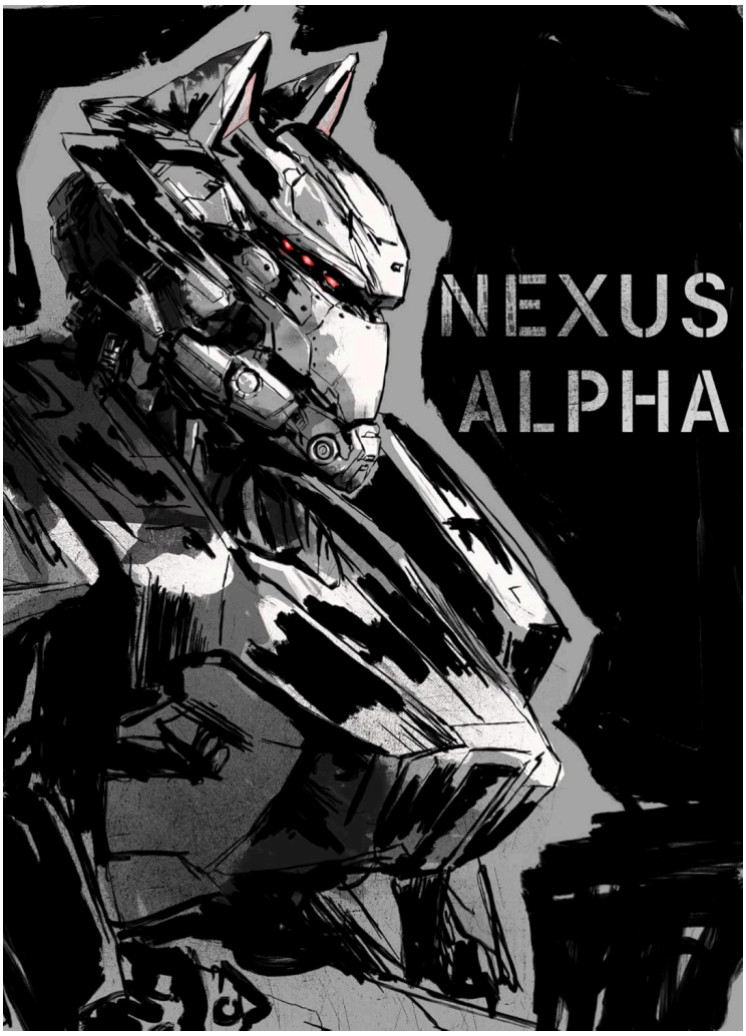
While only a few trans authors seem to have been outright banned, I am getting completely inundated with reports from authors whose work has been delisted. These include many of the most prominent trans authors on itch.io, frequently for works only tagged 'Adult' for heavy or potentially triggering themes. I know that I won't be able to list everything, but in no particular order, here is a list of books that no longer appear in search results on itch.io.

Every title on this list was at least temporarily shadowbanned. Some have been reinstated in the hours since:

- *Nexus Alpha* and others by Ela Bambust
- *Bright Lights, Blood Bounty, Into Darkness, Serial Obsession*, and *NEED* by Elena Abbott
- *Tempting Poison, The Brute of Greengrave, Our Monsters, The Essence of the Eye, As Happy as Pirates or Burglars,* and *Captains of a Tyrant Fate* by Jemma Topaz
- *Eva* by Petra Skelton
- *Saltbrook* and *House of Madness, House of Cards* by Dee Arbacauskas

- *A Memory of Blood and Magic* and *A Memory of War and Solace* by K. N. Brindle
- *I Can't Let Him See Me Swoon* by Alix Nicoud
- *Midnight's Kiss* by M. Belanger
- *Head Cleaner* by Crystal DeForest
- *In the Sea Cave, Moonchild, Blood, Desire and Love, Jamie Was Missing,* and *Shifted Perspectives* by Savika
- *Repression Queen: A Memoir About Gender Transformation Erotica* by Harper O'Neill
- *They Who Brought The Storm, The Gift of Blood,* and *On Wings of Fallen Stars* by Vaela Denarr and Micah Iannandrea
- *The Wonders of Mundus* by Talia Elliot Belser
- *S.M.D.H* by Natalie Tautou
- *Slime Time* by Erin Lee
- *Two Dudebro Gamers Trans Their Gender, Gender Swaps and Gingerbread,* and *Euphoria Scented Candle* by BrieIsCheese
- *From the Inside* by Sophia Turner
- *That Night I Got Dragged Home by a Werewolf* by Autumn Wolff

I have to stop for my own sanity, but you get the point.



I spoke to several of the authors whose works can no longer be found in the itch.io search algorithm. Ela Bambust, one of the most prominent authors in the community, has had her most successful work *Nexus Alpha* delisted from the search results. When I spoke with her, she shared:

> *With people no longer able to find Nexus Alpha, it's going to be harder for me to be discovered. I get a number of sales through natural discovery and a shadowban directly impacts my ability to make a living.*

I also spoke to Talia Elliot Belser, author of the *Wonders of Mundus* series, who shared:

> *Itch was the last refuge for authors of offbeat queer stories, until now. I've sold over a hundred copies of my ebooks on itch, and am struggling to sell them directly through my website. This directly cuts off my way of reaching my audience.*
>
> *It's a shameful act of censorship that Itch should never have implemented – and that the credit card companies have no right to demand of them.*

This situation can generously be described as an absolute clusterfuck – I have no doubt that details will continue to come out over the next few days, and I will do my best to keep this page updated as such.

What Should I Do?

Remove NSFW Tags from your delisted work

I have confirmed evidence from Talia Bhatt and others that **removing NSFW tags such as 'erotica' and 'adult' from your work may un-shadowban your work.** If you have been implicated by this censorship crackdown and rely on itch as your primary stream of income, I would strongly recommend removing your book from the censored parts of the tagging system as soon as possible.

I want to emphasize that **this is not a permanent solution**. If Itch and the payment processors are serious about this ban, I do not doubt that they will double down and refine their censorship over the next few days. This is a stopgap. It will buy you time to figure out where we go from here.

THIS IS RISKY. ONLY DO THIS IF YOU HAVE NO REAL OPTION.

Sign the ACLU Petition Against Mastercard

The American Civil Liberties Union is currently calling for signatures on a petition calling for an immediate end to payment processor censorship of NSFW content. You can sign it here.

Call the Payment Processors and Demand an End to Censorship

It's being reported that Collective Shout filed roughly 1000 phone calls to lobby Mastercard and Visa to make this change in their policy. We need to blow up their phone lines and even out the noise.

- Mastercard (US): 1-800-627-8372
- Mastercard (Global): 1-636-722-7111
- Visa (US + Canada): 1-800-847-2911
- Paypal: 44-0203-901-7000

Read Our Comprehensive Guide on Fighting Literary Censorship

If you take nothing else away from this article, consider reading our extensive guide The Trans Literature Preservation Project: A Practical Guide to Resisting Censorship. Our community has been planning for this possibility since the election. This is a major loss, but we

have ways forward. Download the guide *now* so that even if TFR gets forced off the web you'll maintain access.

Read the Guide | Download the Guide

This is a dark moment for free speech, but we've been through worse, and we'll get through this too. Don't panic, buckle down, and find your community. If history is any guide, we've got a bumpy road ahead.

In solidarity, Bethany Karsten

9 responses to "Major Indie Marketplace Itch.io Shadowbans NSFW Content, Trans Authors Impacted"

Audrey Crimson
July 24, 2025

This is not the first instance of shadowbanning adult content, by itch.io either. My sexual education zine, 'A Girlfag's Guide to Deepthroating' was shadowbanned at least a year ago without warning or notice.

★ Like

Reply

anon
July 24, 2025

censorship is telling a person they cannot eat steak just because a child can't chew it

★ Like

Reply

Nato Golem
July 24, 2025

The take downs actually started on July 22. One of the Affected games was linked in a Discord I am part of last week and I was checking it out on Tuesday July 22, the take down wasn't even an hour old at that point.

★ Like

Reply

morality police, flipphones, aging solo – Pixietails Club Blog
July 25, 2025

[…] shadowbanned (deindexed) and in some cases removed entirely from the platform, with no warning. The Transfeminine Review has an overview of what happened, including specific titles that got […]

★ Like

Reply

I hate to go through this all over again. On July 23rd, Itch.io, one of the most popular platforms… – blissandlove
July 25, 2025

[…] I hate to go through this all over again. Last night, Itch.io, one of the most popular platforms for hosting queer and adult independent media, went through a large-scale crackdown on adult content. […]

★ Like

Reply

azalia
July 27, 2025

this is so sad there was a game about a trans girl moving in with her boyfriend after long online distance dating and the problems it comes with it, i don' t remember the name but it was so real and i wanted to play it t.t

★ Liked by 1 person

Reply

The Threats to Your NSFW Freedoms Online – HBeats Art
July 27, 2025

[…] Transfeminine Review:https://thetransfemininereview.com/2025/07/24/itch-io-nsfw-ban/ […]

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Revela la última prohibición del juego de adultos que controla los juegos que jugamos – Más Cipolletti
July 28, 2025

[…] eliminando una cantidad mucho mayor de juegos que venden y ocultaban a otros de la búsqueda. Revisar transfeminina Informa que Itch.io bloquea el pago para desarrolladores de juegos recién prohibidos. Itch.io no […]

★ Like

Reply

Thousands of games have been censored from major platforms, with LGBTQIA+ creators caught in the crossfire
August 5, 2025

[…] Although Collective Shout claims the move was about censoring games that depict rape and incest content, a number of LGBTQIA+ creators have been caught in the purge. […]

★ Like

Reply

Join the discussion! All comments are moderated. No bigotry, no slurs, no links, please be kind to each other.

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Next: Showcasing the Transfeminine Nominees for the 2025 Lambda Literary Awards (CW #13) →

t f r.

For the love of transfeminine literature.

Since the founding of Topside Press and the subsequent publication of *Nevada* by Imogen Binnie in 2013, transfeminine fiction has emerged into the international literary consciousness like never before. Novels by trans women have found unprecedented success through a slew of publishing deals, literary awards, and mainstream attention. However, the history of trans literature began many decades before 2013, and very little scholarship has engaged with this history, its unique genres and long development, or the works and authors who have toiled largely in obscurity to gain equal access to the press.

This blog aims to document the history of transfeminine literature, highlighting lesser known fiction by transfeminine writers and offering some broader thoughts on the general state and trajectory for trans writers both within and without the publishing industry.

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